

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the topics under research. As the name suggests, the subchapter of background of the study explains the prevailing situation about the topic of this study. The subchapters of research question, aims of the study, scope of the study, and significance of the study state the objectives of this study. The subchapter of clarification of terms defines the main terms used in this study. Lastly, the subchapter of organization of the study provides a preview on how each chapter is constructed.

1.1 Background of the Study

A cohesive and coherent text achieves its purpose by communicating its message effectively, but this outcome cannot be acquired easily. It requires a good understanding and skillful application of text organization. On the contrary, EFL students are found to struggle in making them happen, including in writing explanation texts. Thus, this research believes that analyzing students' work in explanation text with the theme system may show students' strengths and weaknesses for further improvement in creating a coherent and cohesive text. This belief is elaborated more in the arguments below.

In order to accomplish a cohesive and coherent text, it should contain two aspects namely cohesion and coherence. Carter and McCarthy (2006) define cohesion as a grammatical means which creates a semantic link. In addition, they argue that coherence depends not only on grammatical means, but it also depends on contexts involving users' knowledge and the signals the writer puts in a text regarding the field. These two aspects are indispensable and closely related to the organization of the text. Together they construct meaning and produce texture, which defines something as a text (Bloor & Bloor, 2013; Thompson, 2014; Webster, 2015).

Cohesion and coherence are important to facilitate the readers' understanding of a text. As mentioned above, their presence is indispensable because they affect each other. Cohesion provides continuity between parts of a text which assists readers in obtaining optimal understanding (Dascalu et al., 2018;

Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Halliday & Hasan, 1989; McNamara et al., 2014). Altogether with the readers' prior knowledge of the topic, their combination will result in an increase of coherence level. Conversely, if cohesive links are lacking or missing in the text, it will impede the reader's understanding. That is because there are only a few to no grammatical tools that can help them connect the ideas presented in a text.

Despite their importance in constructing a text, many Indonesian EFL students encountered problems in producing cohesion and coherence. This phenomenon can be seen through the findings of previous studies which revealed that Indonesian EFL students struggled to create cohesive and coherent academic texts due to their lack of English competence and understanding of the texts' components (Hidayati, 2018; Nurlatifah & Yusuf, 2022; Prasetyaningrum et al., 2022; Toba et al., 2019). For instance, a study by Ariyanti and Fitriani (2017) found that some Indonesian EFL students face difficulties in producing cohesion and coherence because of their inability to create a thesis statement that connects all the ideas presented in their academic text. Another study by Toba, Noor, and Sanu (2019) gives more illustrations regarding this phenomenon by showing the tendencies found in Indonesian EFL students' academic texts. These tendencies are a lack of transition signals, inconsistent ways to present ideas, and the absence of topic sentences which lead to poor text organization. This phenomenon creates an urgency to further analyze students' strengths and weaknesses in creating a cohesive and coherent text from various genres. This urgency could be met by analyzing students' text with one of the notions of Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL), which is the theme system.

Theme system is one of the aspects that help to realize the functionality of a text through the use of theme, rheme, and thematic progression. Theme system is a grammatical system part of textual metafunction developed by Halliday (Eggins, 2004; Emilia, 2014; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Parts of the theme system, theme and rheme, are used to direct a clause's focus. Meanwhile, another part of the theme system called thematic progression is used to indicate the text's development through thematic shifts and can stipulate the cohesiveness and coherence of a text. According to Emilia (2014), thematic progression shows the focus of a text and the

writer's ability to develop a text locally and globally. Thus, the use of the theme system can represent the level of cohesion and coherence in a text. This fact is also supported by empirical evidence provided by previous studies.

Previous studies have shown that analyzing texts with the theme system can be one of the ways to investigate students' problems in creating a cohesive and coherent text. For instance, previous studies have analyzed texts made by lower- and upper-secondary students using the theme system and found the impact of thematic progression patterns toward their texts (Emilia et al., 2018; Zahra et al., 2020). These studies found that high achiever students employed more thematic patterns in their texts compared to low and middle achiever students. As a result, texts made by high achiever students have a higher level of coherence and cohesion in contrast to other students. From the choice of theme, teachers can also see students' ability to make a logical link between ideas with the textual theme, set the text focus with the topical theme, and ability to assert personal views with the interpersonal theme (Emilia et al., 2018; Hadiani & Permata, 2019; Noprianto, 2017; Pun, 2019; Zahra et al., 2020). Looking at its potential, this study employed theme system analysis to fulfill the need to find students' strengths and weaknesses in writing, specifically in the explanation text.

Explanation text is one of the academic texts Indonesian EFL students should learn, but it has a complicated nature which makes it hard to create. It is a text that contains many similar characteristics to other texts such as descriptive, recount, procedure, and argumentative texts (Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Emilia, 2011). Therefore, it often gets confused with those genres because an explanation text is also used to describe a phenomenon, explain its stages, and state its causal relationship with other things in a time sequence.

Additionally, some Indonesian EFL students are also found to face challenges in writing a well-organized explanation text due to the lack of cohesion and coherence in their text. Previous studies found that students' current knowledge and experience are not sufficient to produce coherence and cohesion in their texts. For example, research by Hadiani and Permata (2019) revealed that students are still using incorrect conjunctions and references in their explanation text. Similarly, another study under the same topic also found that students tend to overuse additive

conjunctions due to their lack of understanding and experience in utilizing other conjunctions (Rizki et al., 2022). Consequently, explanation texts created by the participants in both studies are still lacking in terms of the connectedness of ideas.

Despite the issues revolving around the genre, the ability to construe and construct an explanation text is something that Indonesian EFL students should master to fulfill the intended learning outcomes. These intended learning outcomes are regulated in the regulation of Ministry Education and Culture number 37 of 2018 which states that in the K-13 curriculum, eleventh-grade students should be able to differentiate the social function, generic structure, and language features of various explanation texts regarding natural or social phenomena covered in their grade. As stated above, these concerns and urgencies drive the researcher to conduct theme system analysis on explanation texts created by Indonesian EFL students in eleventh grade.

Research under the topic of theme system analysis on explanation texts has previously been done and provides more insight into the benefits of researching this topic. A study conducted by Pun (2019) involving the SFL approach in analyzing three secondary chemistry textbooks showed that the lexicogrammatical features of explanation texts exist to fulfill the texts' social function. Some of its findings are related to the function of the theme system. For instance, it showed how nominalizations are used to develop themes and how using synonyms for repeated use of one topical theme results in less-developed thematic progression. Apart from textbook analysis, a case study conducted by Hadiani and Permata (2019) involving students' explanation texts showed that the utilization of textual themes helps students to fulfill the generic structure of the explanation texts by explaining the sequence of events in a coherent manner.

Despite its potential, there is still a limited amount of study that involves theme system analysis of explanation texts in the EFL high school context. The need to explore this topic in various text types and contexts has also been mentioned in the previous study (Emilia et al., 2018). Therefore, this study aimed to fill the previous studies' gap by doing a theme system analysis of eleventh-grade Indonesian EFL students' explanation texts by analyzing theme choices and thematic progression used in their texts through text analysis.

1.2 Research Question

This study is conducted to answer the following questions.

1. How are the realizations of theme choice and thematic progression in explanation texts of Indonesian EFL high school students?

1.3 Aim of the Study

In order to obtain the answer to the research question, this study aimed to discover how Indonesian EFL high school students present their ideas to create a coherent and cohesive explanation text by analyzing the realizations of theme choice and the thematic progression in the text.

1.4 Scope of the Study

Considering the suitability of explanation texts with the high school curriculum, this study intended to analyze the realizations of themes and thematic progression in the text created by eleventh-grade Indonesian EFL students. As suggested in the research question and aim, this study is limited to only collecting and analyzing the texts after they have been made. Therefore, this study does not include a detailed description of the text making process.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical benefits for Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) research, especially the theme system. The first theoretical benefit is a more profound understanding of the concept and problems around the theme system in the EFL classroom context. The following theoretical benefit is providing more empirical evidence to support the current theories and fill the previous studies' research gap. Additionally, this study's first practical benefit is providing pedagogical implications in teaching explanation texts to Indonesian EFL students. Second, this study intended to increase people's interest in conducting more research in the area of SFL in the EFL classroom context.

1.6 Clarification of Terms

There are several terms utilized in this study. Therefore, below are the clarifications of terms in order to avoid misinterpretation:

- a) **Systemic Functional Linguistic** or SFL is a framework based on the work of J. R. Firth and developed by M. A. K. Halliday, which views language as a resource for meaning-making through an organized system of options (Eggins, 2004; Fontaine, 2012).
- b) **Functional Grammar** is a grammar model developed from the SFL framework. It views how language is structured from the 'above' or how context impacts the meaning-making process (Emilia, 2014; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). There are four fundamental functional grammar categories: class, structure, unit, and system (Emilia, 2014; Fontaine, 2012; Halliday, 2002; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Functional grammar is realized through ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions.
- c) **Theme** is one of the clausal elements under the textual metafunction, which comes first in a clause. It indicates what the clause is about by orienting the readers to familiar or 'given' information (Eggins, 2004; Emilia, 2014; Fontaine, 2012; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).
- d) **Rheme** is one of the clausal elements under the textual metafunction and comes after a theme. It contains the rest of the message in a clause by giving unfamiliar or 'new' information (Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).
- e) **Thematic Progression** is thematic patterns caused by the dynamic and unplanned nature of discourse (Eggins, 2004). There are three main patterns of thematic progression: (a) The zig-zag pattern (also known as the linear or simple linear pattern), (b) The theme reiteration (also known as the constant thematic progression pattern), and (c) The multiple-Rheme pattern (or also known as progression with derived themes or multiple theme pattern) (Eggins, 2004; Emilia, 2014).
- f) **Explanation Texts** explain how something works or why something happens (Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Emilia, 2011). In general, the generic structures of explanation texts are phenomenon identification and

explanation sequences of how or why. In order to achieve the purpose of this genre, there are several language features that could be used namely generalized participants, tracking items, temporal and causal sequences, passive voice, present tense, and technical terms (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Rose & Martin, 2012).

1.7 Organization of the Study

In regard to the organization, this study consists of five chapters. The overview of each chapter is listed below.

1. **Chapter I Introduction** provides background information on the issue and gives a general overview of this study. This chapter comprises several subchapters, namely background of the study, research question, aim of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, clarification of terms, and organization of the study.
2. **Chapter II Literature Review** explains the existing theories about the topic of this study and discusses previous studies regarding it. Five subchapters were presented in this chapter, namely cohesion and coherence in writing, systemic functional linguistics, theme system, explanation texts, and previous studies on theme system analysis in academic texts.
3. **Chapter III Research Methodology** explains how this study is designed, how the data is obtained, and how it is analyzed. Thus, this chapter consists of subchapters on research design, context of the study, data collection, and data analysis.
4. **Chapter IV Findings and Discussions** reports the findings from the data analysis and discusses their implications through two main subchapters, the realizations of theme choice and thematic progression in students' explanation texts. This chapter also ends with the subchapter of concluding remark which summarizes the key findings.
5. **Chapter V Conclusion and Recommendation** concludes the study by reiterating the main findings and reflecting on how the study is conducted. It consists of the subchapters of conclusion, pedagogical implication, limitations of the study, and recommendation for future studies.